



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE NEED OF BROAD-GAUGE COURSES IN GEOGRAPHY

R. H. WHITBECK

University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin

THE PREVAILING IGNORANCE OF GEOGRAPHY

Every teacher in college or normal school who has had occasion to give courses which presupposed a knowledge of elementary geography on the part of his students has found that this knowledge could not be counted upon. A professor of economic geography in one of our large universities said some years ago that he found it necessary to give a course in grade-school geography in his university before he could proceed with the advanced phases of geography with which his own courses were supposed to deal. Repeated examinations in elementary geography given to entering classes in the University of Wisconsin show that a large majority of the Freshmen are surprisingly uncertain about most of the things taught in grade-school geography. It is not uncommon to find that a considerable proportion of the Freshmen cannot indicate correctly over half of the states of the Union, when they are given an outline map of the United States showing the state boundaries. Given an outline map, very few students can locate with even approximate accuracy the dozen largest cities of their own country. When tested upon a list of say fifty of the most important cities of the world, the majority of the students cannot tell even in what country one-half of these cities are located.

I gave a test of this character to a class of 250 students recently. Among the questions asked was this one: "Give your estimate of the approximate area (1) of your own state, (2) of Japan, (3) of the United States, (4) of the British Isles, and (5) of Germany." It was not expected that the students would know the areas of any of these geographical units. The only purpose of the question was to discover whether they really had any basis for intelligently estimating areas of important countries. Answers varied to an

unbelievable extent. For example, one student answered that the British Isles have an area of 1,000 square miles, while a class-mate estimated it at 10,000,000 square miles. One student estimated the area of the United States at 15,000 square miles, another at 15,000,000 square miles, another at 75,000,000, and another at 110,000,000. One student estimated Japan at 750 square miles, another at 10,000,000, and another at 40,000,000.

Another question in the test referred to asked for estimates of distances between certain large cities. Again, it was not expected that any considerable degree of accuracy would be shown, yet one student estimated the distance between Chicago and New Orleans at 210 miles, while another student in the same class estimated it at 19,000 miles. One student estimated the distance from New York to Liverpool at 600 miles, another at 20,000 miles; similar variations existed throughout the answers. One question asked was: "In what country is each of the following: Buenos Aires, Antwerp, Calcutta, Venice, and Halifax?" It is to be noted that all that was asked was to tell *in what country* these cities are, nothing more. Notwithstanding the fact that Buenos Aires is one of the largest cities of the world, and the largest city in the Southern Hemisphere, a majority of these collegians could not tell even in what country it is located. A river of such historical importance as the Tiber was placed in Asia, France, India, Palestine, Africa, Siberia, Persia, and Arabia.

Similar tests have been given in other universities and in normal schools, and the reports of these have come to my attention; all of them indicate the same absence of reliable knowledge of geography on the part of the students. Nor is the lack of knowledge confined simply to place-geography. The majority of the students whom I have tested cannot correctly distinguish between latitude and longitude. Rarely do I find a student who knows the causes for the change of seasons. In a recent test over 40 per cent of the students said that Alaska is *southwest* of the north pole. Most students seem to understand that all parts of the frigid zones have six months of day and six months of night. Although Pennsylvania produces practically no iron ore, students seem to believe that Pennsylvania is still our great source of iron ore; only about

15 per cent of the students who took the test referred to were aware that Minnesota is our foremost state in the production of this commodity—in fact, produces more than half of all the iron ore mined in this country. These are only a few examples.

It makes little difference what sort of questions are asked, the uncertainty and inaccuracy of the student's knowledge of geography seems to be the same. This statement is not made in a fault-finding attitude. From many years' experience in supervising grade- and high-school work, I am convinced that the teachers in these schools try with utmost conscientiousness to teach their subjects effectively. They do their work, on the whole, as well as college teachers do theirs.

CAUSE OF THE UNSATISFACTORY CONDITION

The cause of the unsatisfactory condition of students' geographical knowledge is quite clear. Pupils in the grades study geography almost entirely from books. They study statements and facts which are quite removed from the child's world. A large part of the geographical knowledge obtained in the grades is not called into immediate use and is soon forgotten.

An examination was given in a survey of geography teaching in Boston in 1916. The same examination was given to eighth-grade pupils, high-school pupils, and normal-school students. In a number of the questions the grade-school pupils did better than the normal-school students, although the latter were about to become teachers of geography.

The fact is that elementary geography is, almost of necessity, a study that appeals mainly to the memory, and the facts of geography learned in the grade school are soon forgotten. The pupils are immature when they learn these facts and do not appreciate their bearing or relationships. They have not the experience or general knowledge to grasp the real meaning of most of the geographical information which they temporarily possess. Unless they have occasion to use this knowledge in high school, or have it supplemented by a geographical course in high school, they pass on into higher institutions or into active life with a highly attenuated knowledge of the geography of their own country and of the world.

THE NEED OF ADEQUATE INSTRUCTION IN GEOGRAPHY

The present war has drawn our attention to many changes which we shall want to make in the near future. The American people are thinking about world-affairs and national policies as they never have before. They are already consulting maps and atlases and gazetteers with an interest never before manifested in this country. Thousands of American people are now deeply interested in parts of the world in which they had no interest prior to this war; and studiously inclined people are reading textbooks of geography in order to be better informed along the lines of these interests.

The war is expanding our horizon, and the degree of provincialism which has characterized us will not continue. Our financial, commercial, and political interests in every part of the world are going to increase year by year. The unexpected friendship shown by our sister-republics of South America in coming to our moral support in this war is sure to give us more interest in South America and a more sympathetic attitude toward South Americans. The Balkan States, Turkey, and Italy are coming to be more than mere names to us. Hundreds of our young men must be trained for consular positions or for positions as representatives of American manufacturers in foreign lands. A country with the enormous resources and energies of the United States is bound to expand its interests into every part of the earth. There was never a time in our history when geographical knowledge was more needed than it is now and will be in years to come.

Geographical knowledge is an integral part of one's equipment for life. This is recognized in every civilized country, for geography is a required branch of study in the elementary schools of every land that has schools. In the leading European countries geography is taught throughout the years corresponding to our high-school period. In America we have been content with offering an optional course in physical geography and possibly one in commercial geography. Physical geography seems to be declining in favor, while commercial geography is advancing in favor in American high schools, yet every experienced school man realizes that commercial geography may be a very empty and unprofitable

branch, particularly if it consists in memorizing pages of facts about products, exports, imports, and the like. All geographers recognize that the type of geography that is of worth is that which trains students in *understanding* the significant facts of geography and the underlying reasons for them. The kind of geography that the man of affairs or the man of scholarly pursuits uses every week of his life is a knowledge of the governments, cities, peoples, resources, and industries of the important nations of the world. Everybody grants that a high-school course should provide historical studies, literary studies, and scientific studies. Most people will also grant that the high-school course should provide geographical instruction, and perhaps require all students to take at least a minimum amount of it. Thoughtful men and women want to know, are really anxious to know, more about Russia, to have a better understanding of Japan, India, China, Canada, Australia, Argentina, Brazil. Every person who reads the current periodicals would welcome a better knowledge of the resources, of the industries, and of the peoples of European lands and of South America.

THE KIND OF GEOGRAPHY NEEDED

The kind of geography which the demands of life call for is a sort of politico-economic geography of the nations which constitute the dominant powers or the rising powers of the world. We want our children to come out of the schools with more knowledge of these things than we obtained. I believe that if we were to call into conference a thousand intelligent parents from all parts of this country and ask them, "Would you like to have your sons and daughters given a thorough course in the geography of the world?" we should get the answer "Yes" from more than 90 per cent of them.

The time is ripe for giving increased attention in the high schools to a broad-gauge course in geography. Such a study gives breadth of outlook, breadth of interest, breadth of sympathy, and it contributes materially to good citizenship. It enables us to understand better what we read, it qualifies us to converse more intelligently and to listen to lectures and sermons and addresses with more appreciation. It adds, in short, an essential element

of an all-around education. In my judgment the move which is now under way supported by the National Council of Geography Teachers is going to grow into a national movement for the strengthening and improving of geographical instruction in the schools, particularly instruction in the secondary school which comes at a time when pupils are old enough to understand and appreciate more fully than they possibly could do in the grade schools the real meaning of the geographical ideas which are taught to them. I believe that this movement will receive support from every part of the land, from school men, from professional men and from business men alike.